Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20554

In the Matter of	)	
	)	
1998 Biennial Regulatory Review --	)	
Review of the Commission's	)	MM Docket No. 98-35
Broadcast Ownership Rules and	)	
Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to	)	
Section 202 of the Telecommunications	)	
Act of 1996	)	

REPLY COMMENTS OF PAXSON COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

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August 21, 1998

SUMMARY

After reviewing the comments in this proceeding, there should be no question in the Commission's mind that the UHF discount must be retained. The signal handicap suffered by UHF television stations has not been corrected -- by virtue of the laws of physics and specifically the propagation characteristics inherent in a UHF signal. UHF stations still do not reach as many viewers as VHF stations. Arguments made in this proceeding that improvements in receiver technology and mandatory cable carriage have ameliorated the UHF handicap are seriously flawed. Receiver technology cannot compensate for the deficiencies in a UHF signal. And, because a television station's ability to obtain carriage on a cable system is dependent on the quality of its signal, many UHF stations are not carried on cable because their signals are simply not strong enough.

The implementation of digital television will not improve UHF signal delivery either. Because the DTV allotment scheme is based on replication of existing service, UHF stations' digital service will be comparable to their current analog service, perpetuating the signal handicap. DBS also provides no relief. It will be just as difficult for a UHF station to deliver a signal over the air to a DBS antenna as it is to deliver a signal to an analog antenna.

The evidence presented in this proceeding amply shows that the UHF discount has had and will continue to have significant economic and programming benefits. For instance, the UHF discount has been critical to the continued survival of UHF stations. Without the regulatory flexibility to acquire a sufficient number of stations, it is unlikely that Paxson and other group owners would have made such substantial investments in UHF stations. The UHF discount also enables the development of new broadcast networks. Through the UHF discount, Paxson has been able to acquire a significant number of stations that will serve as the broadcast

distribution system for PAXTV, the seventh over-the-air broadcast network. Paxson and the new PAXTV network are the new economic paradigm for targeting fractionalized television audiences -- offering high quality and competitive programming alternatives to both viewers and advertisers that, absent Paxson's ownership of its stations through the UHF discount, would not exist. Scheduled to launch on August 31, 1998, PAXTV will provide the American public with unique, family-oriented programming that is free of the senseless violence, explicit sex and foul language present in so much television programming today. This new network will enhance not only the level of competition among the broadcast networks but also the diversity of free, over-the-air programming available to viewers.

Paxson urges the Commission to use this proceeding to explore and adopt meaningful incentives to increasing new entrant and minority ownership of broadcast stations. The financing and programming barriers to new entrant and minority ownership simply will not go away by themselves. Both the Paxson Diversity Plan and Council Tree Communications' designated entity proposal provide sound options for removing those barriers and increasing the opportunities for new broadcasters.

Finally, Paxson joins the other broadcast networks in urging elimination of the dual network rule. In the highly competitive and diverse nature of the video programming industry, broadcast networks should not be subject to more restrictive requirements than other video programming providers. And, in the coming years, broadcast networks will require increased flexibility in developing economic and competitive strategies to ensure their continued survival. As the dual network rule has outlived its purpose, it should be repealed.

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To: The Commission

REPLY COMMENTS OF PAXSON COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

Paxson Communications Corporation ("Paxson"), by its attorneys, hereby submits its Reply Comments in the FCC's *Notice of Inquiry* in the above-captioned proceeding.[1/]

I. INTRODUCTION.

The comments filed in this proceeding demonstrate that retaining the UHF discount is manifestly in the public interest. The rule's underlying basis, the signal handicap suffered by UHF stations in comparison to VHF stations, still exists and will continue to exist in the digital world. Eliminating or narrowing the UHF discount would only exacerbate this handicap to the detriment of UHF stations, emerging broadcast television networks and the public. Retaining the UHF discount, on the other hand, will ensure continued program diversity and competition

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1/ *1998 Biennial Regulatory Review -- Review of the Commission's Broadcast Ownership Rules and Other Rules Adopted Pursuant to Section 202 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Notice of Inquiry,* MM Docket No. 98-35, FCC 98-37 (rel. Mar. 13, 1998) ("*Notice of Inquiry*").

among television program networks, and provide an incentive for the development of new networks.

In its own Comments in this proceeding, Paxson urged the FCC to increase the national television audience reach cap to 40%. Paxson demonstrated that this small increase in the national cap would have no adverse impact on the intensely diverse and competitive television industry. In these Reply Comments, Paxson also urges the Commission to create an exemption to the national audience reach cap for those companies with a non-controlling ownership interest in minority-owned and new entrant broadcasters. This exemption would encourage investment in minority-owned companies, without having any negative effect on diversity and competition.

Finally, Paxson supports elimination of the dual network rule. As demonstrated by numerous commenters, the prohibition on ownership of two broadcast networks no longer serves the public interest and should be repealed.

II. THE UHF DISCOUNT.

There is no basis for the suggestion made by some commenters that the UHF discount should be eliminated because the UHF signal handicap no longer exists or that retaining the UHF discount will have an adverse impact on diversity and competition.[2/] As Paxson demonstrated in

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[2/] *See* Joint Comments of Press Communications, LLC and Greater Media, Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 4 ("Press Comments"); Comments of National Broadcasting Company, Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 16 ("NBC Comments"); Comments of Center for Media Education, Chinese for Affirmative Action, The Civil Rights Forum, Feminist Majority Foundation, League of United Latin American Citizens, Minority Media and Telecommunications Council, NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, Philadelphia Lesbian and Gay Task Force, Rainbow/PUSH Coalition and Women's Institute for Freedom of the Press, MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 17 ("CME Comments"); Comments of ABC, Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 18-21 ("ABC Comments").

its Comments,[3] UHF stations' limited signal reach is a technical and economic handicap that has not been overcome through advanced receivers or mandatory carriage on cable systems. Nor will the handicap be corrected through the conversion to digital television ("DTV"). Because the conversion to DTV is based on service replication, not service maximization, UHF stations simply will not have the same DTV service areas as their VHF competitors. None of the commenters has submitted any evidence that the UHF discount has had an adverse impact on program diversity or economic competition. Indeed, the evidence demonstrates otherwise. Not only has program diversity and competition increased since 1985 when the UHF discount was adopted, but the UHF discount has proven essential to the growth of new broadcast networks, offering viable alternatives to the original three networks, ABC, CBS and NBC.

A. Advances in Technology and Cable Carriage Have Not Corrected the UHF Handicap.

1. Receiver Technology Does Not Improve Signal Strength.

Contrary to the assertions of ABC, Inc. ("ABC") and the Center for Media Education, *et al.* ("CME"),[4] improvements in television receivers have not leveled the playing field between UHF and VHF stations. As Paxson established in its Comments, a UHF signal is inherently weaker than a VHF signal. The propagation characteristics of a UHF channel make its signal transmissions far more susceptible to terrain obstructions than VHF signals, and receiver technology simply cannot compensate for this inherent signal problem.[5] As described in the

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[3] Comments of Paxson Communications Corporation, MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 5-12 ("Paxson Comments").

[4] ABC Comments at 19; CME Comments at 17-18.

[5] *See* Joint Comments of Fox Television Stations, Inc. and USA Broadcasting, Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 19-21 ("Fox/USA Comments"), and

Fox/USA Comments, even a UHF station operating with maximum facilities, nondirectional ERP of 5,000 kilowatts and HAAT of 610 meters, could achieve "only 69.1 percent of the maximum low band VHF Grade B area coverage, and only 79.2 percent of the maximum high band VHF Grade B area coverage."[6/] Of course, no UHF station is able to achieve maximum facilities so it is clear that the actual differences between UHF and VHF coverage are much greater.[7/]

The Commission has recognized that

> [d]ue to the physical nature of the UHF and VHF bands, *delivery of television signals is inherently more difficult at UHF.* It should be recognized that *actual equality between these two services cannot be expected* because the laws of physics dictate that UHF signal strength will decrease more rapidly with distance than does VHF signal strength. . . . [T]he fundamental limitation of UHF television involves its ability physically to reach viewers . . .[8/]

Paxson is unaware of any changes in the laws of physics over the last 13 years that would change the inherent disparity between the UHF and VHF bands. UHF stations simply do not have the physical ability to achieve the signal coverage of a VHF station.[9/] None of the commenters

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Engineering Statement of Jules Cohen, P.E., Attachment B thereto.

[6/] *Id.* Attachment B at 3.

[7/] *Id.*

[8/] *Amendment of Section 73.3555 [formerly Sections 73.35, 73.240 and 73.636] of the Commission's Rules Relating to Multiple Ownership of AM, FM and Television Broadcast Stations, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 100 F.C.C.2d 74, 93 (1985) (emphasis added).

[9/] *See* Comments of the Association of Local Television Stations, Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 8 ("ALTV Comments") ("[T]he limitations imposed on the UHF band are a matter of physics that do not change with the passage of time."). *See generally* Fox/USA Comments, Exhibit B.

arguing against retention of the UHF discount has offered one iota of evidence to suggest otherwise.

2. Cable Carriage Has Not Corrected the UHF Handicap.

Mandatory cable carriage has not been the cure-all that ABC suggests.[10/] Although UHF stations have benefitted from mandatory cable carriage, cable carriage has not completely alleviated the disparity between UHF and VHF stations. Even with mandatory cable carriage rights, UHF stations are *still disadvantaged* because of their weaker signals. The fact remains that only 65% of television households in the United States subscribe to cable.[11/] Thus, UHF stations, because of their weaker signals are disadvantaged in reaching the remaining 35% of the nation's television households that receive broadcast signals over-the-air.

ABC's assumption that cable subscribers *ipso facto* receive via cable all of a market's UHF stations is grossly mistaken. Nothing could be further from the truth. A television station must provide a Grade B signal to a cable system headend in order to obtain mandatory cable carriage. Because of their limited service areas many UHF stations do not provide Grade B coverage to all cable headends in their market. Accordingly, many UHF stations are not carried on all of the cable systems in their markets because their signals cannot reach the system's headend. In addition, based on signal problems, cable systems routinely request authority from the FCC not to carry a UHF signal in certain communities and the FCC routinely grants such requests.

[10/] ABC Comments at 19.

[11/] *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1998* at xxxi.

As an example, since 1996, numerous cable systems serving communities in the New York and New Jersey portions of the New York, New York Designated Market Area ("DMA"), as defined by A.C. Nielsen, have petitioned the FCC for permission not to carry Paxson's television station WIPX(TV), licensed to Bridgeport, Connecticut and included in the New York Area of Dominant Influence ("ADI"). The FCC has, in almost all cases, granted those petitions based in large part on the station's limited coverage of the market. *See, e.g., Petition of U.S. Cablevision, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 21144, 21154 (1997), where the Commission granted the cable operator's petition to delete from WIPX(TV)'s television market communities in Dutchess, Orange, Putnam and Ulster Counties lying outside of the station's Grade B contour;[12/] *Petition of TKR Cable Company, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 3525, 3533 (1997), in which the Commission authorized TKR Cable not to carry WIPX(TV) on its systems serving communities in Orange County, New York, and Hamilton, Mercer, Monmouth, Middlesex, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset and Union Counties, New Jersey, based on distance to the cable communities and the fact that WIPX(TV)'s Grade B contour did not reach the communities at issue; and *Petition of TCI of Northern New Jersey, Inc., Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 891, 896 (1997), where the Commission granted the cable operator's petition to delete from WIPX(TV)'s television market 53 communities in northern New Jersey based in part on "dearth of viewership" and "lack of . . . Grade B coverage."[13/]

[12/] Communities falling within WIPX(TV)'s Grade B contour were not deleted. *See id.* at 21153.

[13/] *See also Petition of TKR Cable Company, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd 17121, 17127, 17129 (1996) (citing lack of Grade B coverage and distance from cable communities as reasons to delete New York and New Jersey communities from WIPX(TV)'s television market); *Petition of Time Warner New York City Cable Group, Memorandum Opinion*

Paxson estimates that as a result of these decisions, WIPX(TV) is currently carried on cable systems serving only four of the 29 counties in its own ADI! The 25 counties in which WIPX(TV) is *not* carried represent 89% of the ADI's television households.[14/] Thus, in New York, due to its inability to obtain cable carriage, WIPX(TV)'s UHF handicap is 89%, not 50%.[15/]

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and Order, 12 FCC Rcd 13094, 13101 (1996), where the Commission granted Time Warner's request to delete the communities of Northern and Southern Manhattan, Eastern, Western, and Southern Queens, Western Brooklyn, and Staten Island, New York from WIPX(TV)'s television market because "[b]ased on geography and other relevant information, [the FCC] believe[s] that the New York City cable communities are sufficiently removed from WHAI that they ought not be deemed a part of the station's market for mandatory carriage purposes;" *Petition of Continental Cablevision of Western New England, Inc., Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd 6488, 6509, 6510 (1996), *aff'd*, 12 FCC Rcd 12262 (1997), deleting 13 communities in Westchester and Rockland Counties, New York from WIPX(TV)'s television market because "these communities fall outside of the station's Grade B contour and are on the far side of the Hudson River from WHAI's service area;" *Petition of Time Warner Entertainment-Advance/Newhouse Partnership, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd 6541, 6555, (1996), *aff'd,* 12 FCC Rcd 12262 (1997), where the Commission ruled that 14 communities in Bergen County, New Jersey should be deleted from WIPX(TV)'s television market because "Time Warner's communities are, on average, 61 miles away from the station and fall outside the fringe of the station's Grade B contour. In addition, the cable communities are separated from the station by New York City and the Hudson River;" *Petition of Clear Cablevision Inc. and Manchester Cablevision Inc. both d/b/a/ Adelphia Cable Communications, Memorandum Opinion and Order*, 11 FCC Rcd 22282, 22292 (1996), where the Commission deleted from WIPX(TV)'s television market the communities served by Adelphia's Ocean County, New Jersey cable systems citing "lack of historical carriage," "dearth of audience," "geographic distance," and "lack of Grade B coverage."

[14/] *Broadcasting & Cable Yearbook 1997* at C-198.

[15/] The story is similar for Paxson's other UHF stations. WPXB(TV) (formerly WGOT-TV), licensed to Merrimack, New Hampshire, in the Boston, Massachusetts ADI, is not carried on a number of cable systems in the ADI because it lacks the signal strength to provide sufficient Grade B coverage to communities served by those cable systems. *See, e.g., Greater Worcester Cablevision, Inc. Worcester, Massachusetts; For Modification of Television Broadcast Station WGOT's ADI, Memorandum Opinion and Order,* 12 FCC Rcd 17347 (1997); *Petition of Time Warner Cable for Modification of Market of Television Station WGOT-TV, Merrimack, New Hampshire, Memorandum Opinion and Order,* 12 FCC Rcd 23249 (1997).

The UHF/VHF disparity is further exacerbated by the fact that by virtue of statutory and regulatory restrictions, VHF stations enjoy preferred cable channel assignments over their UHF counterparts. Television viewers in cable households, like noncable viewers, locate the relatively highly-rated broadcast network programming on the lowest television channels, as most "Big Three" broadcast network affiliates are VHF stations.[16/] Moreover, the typical television viewer logically begins the search for news or entertainment programming at or near the very lowest channel he or she receives, rather than initiating the "channel surfing" efforts at some arbitrary, double-digit channel that might correspond to or be near a local UHF station's channel assignment.

The audience's natural preference for low channels is compounded in the cable world. Under statutory and regulatory channel positioning restrictions, cable systems generally must assign television stations their on-air channels.[17/] VHF stations, therefore, almost always obtain very low channel assignments in cable line-ups, whereas UHF channels naturally find themselves carried on high channels. As a result, VHF broadcast stations (and cable networks assigned to low channels by the local cable operators) obtain more initial "foot traffic" from television viewers than UHF stations, which, as a result of their mandated high channel assignments, see much less "foot traffic."

16/ *See* Paxson Comments at 19-20.

17/ 47 U.S.C. § 534(b)(6) (1994); 47 C.F.R. § 76.57 (1997).

A station or cable program with a low channel assignment, then, enjoys a higher probability of achieving a measurable level of viewership than one placed on a higher channel.[18/] With the strong connection between channel position and profit in mind, cable operators prior to the adoption of the 1992 Cable Act were known to "root out" local broadcast stations from "prime VHF channel slots" in favor of "less popular cable services in which the cable operator ha[d] an equity interest and/or in which the cable operator [was] selling advertising time."[19/] In that manner, the cable programer would have the opportunity "to catch" a much larger number of "grazing" viewers than would be possible at a higher channel assignment. Today, the typical cable channel line-up features less-than prominent high assignments for very low rated channels such as public, educational, government, leased access and similar program offerings, which, of course, surround the mandated channel assignments for local UHF stations.

Paxson believes that mandatory cable carriage has been critical to the survival of UHF stations. It has not, however, eliminated the inherent signal handicap suffered by all UHF television stations. These circumstances warrant retaining the UHF discount.

B. The Conversion to DTV Will Not Alleviate the UHF Handicap.

Press Communications, LLC's ("Press") argument that the UHF handicap will be eliminated through the implementation of DTV[20/] ignores the basic premise underlying the allocation of DTV channels. The Commission's DTV allotment scheme is based primarily on

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[18/] *See* House Committee on Energy and Commerce, H.R. Rep. No. 102-628, at 55. (1992) (House Committee "is aware that certain cable programmers offer cable systems financial incentives to be placed on a lower channel number where viewers initially 'graze' in search of an attractive program").

[19/] *Id.* (quoting testimony before Committee).

[20/] Press Comments at 5.

replication of existing analog service.[21/] The Commission fully considered adopting a service maximization approach that would roughly equalize coverage among all television stations, regardless of current service areas.[22/] Based in part on numerous objections from broadcasters, the Commission ultimately decided to base DTV channel allotments on service replication.[23/]

Because DTV channels, power levels and height requirements are based on replication of existing service areas (rather than potential coverage with maximum facilities), it is not surprising that there are significant disparities between VHF stations' DTV technical parameters and those assigned to UHF stations. Paxson demonstrated in its Comments that a greater than 50% power disparity exists between analog UHF stations operating on DTV UHF channels, and analog VHF stations operating on DTV UHF channels.[24/] In some markets, UHF stations have as little as 5% of the power as that assigned to VHF stations, thus ensuring that UHF stations will continue to operate with weaker signals, reaching fewer viewers even with the conversion to DTV.[25/]

21/ *Advanced Television Systems and Their Impact upon the Existing Television Broadcast Service, Sixth Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd 14588, 14605 (1997) ("*Sixth Report and Order*"), *on reconsideration, Memorandum Opinion and Order on Reconsideration of The Sixth Report and Order*, 13 FCC Rcd 7418 (1998) ("*Sixth DTV Reconsideration*"), *appeal pending*.

22/ *Advanced Television Systems and Their Impact upon the Existing Television Broadcast Service, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making*, 7 FCC Rcd 5376, 5379 (1992).

23/ *Sixth Report and Order*, 12 FCC Rcd at 14605.

24/ *See* Paxson Comments at 13.

25/ *See* Fox/USA Comments at 22 and Attachment B thereto.

C. *DBS Will Not Ameliorate the VHF/UHF Signal Disparity.*

The increased number and variety of video program distributors, while increasing competition in the video program market, has failed to reduce the significant disparities between VHF and UHF stations. As Univision noted in its Comments, the widespread use of high-quality (and even digital) cable, the Direct Broadcast Satellite Service ("DBS"), VCRs and DVD players over the past several years has made the viewing public less inclined to accept inferior, sometimes "snowy" UHF signals received at the fringe of reception.[26/] Moreover, many DBS viewers simply cannot receive local signals without the use of their own personal indoor antennas, and, despite some improvement in antenna designs, those antennas often do not receive clear -- or even acceptable -- UHF signals.[27/] As a result, consumers continue to prefer the clear broadcast signals available primarily from VHF stations.

DBS's efforts to expand into the delivery of local broadcast networks are unlikely to improve the position of UHF stations. As the Commission is aware, the DBS industry currently is working to develop antennas that would enable DBS subscribers to receive over-the-air broadcasts in addition to satellite signals.[28/] At this point, however, broadcasters have not received any assurance from the DBS industry that these new devices would be able to overcome the UHF reception difficulties experienced by the current generation of over-the-air antennas. As a result, even if DBS subscribers at some future time are able to receive broadcast signals,

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[26/] *See* Comments of Univision Communications Inc., MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 4 ("Univision Comments").

[27/] *See id.* at 4-5.

[28/] *See Competition in the Video Programming Distribution Market (Fourth Annual Report)*, 11 CR 147, 200 (1998).

millions of such viewers likely could continue to receive inferior UHF signals. And when these viewers have the option of choosing among scores of digital satellite signals, clear over-the-air VHF signals or "snowy" over-the-air UHF signals, it is unlikely indeed that UHF stations will have any measurable viewership from DBS subscribers.

D. Even With the UHF Discount, UHF Stations Do Not Perform as Well Economically as VHF Stations.

It is not surprising that ABC, Press and CME fail to cite to any statistics demonstrating that UHF and VHF stations perform at an economic par with each other. The economic evidence demonstrates clearly that the UHF handicap is alive and well. VHF stations, by virtue of their superior signal strength, cable carriage and preferred cable channel assignments, continue to out-perform UHF stations by more than 50% with respect to *both* revenues and audience share ratings. Coupled with the significant costs of operating a UHF station, there can be no doubt that UHF stations remain economically handicapped when compared to their VHF competitors.

The comments filed in this proceeding provide convincing evidence of the economic disparity between UHF and VHF stations. In its Comments, Paxson showed that, because a UHF station, by its very nature, must operate with higher power than a VHF station, and because higher power requires more electricity and a more powerful transmitter, it is far more expensive to operate a UHF station than a VHF station. A UHF station's electricity costs alone range from one and one-half to three times a VHF station's electricity costs.[29/] Whereas a transmitter for a

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[29/] Paxson Comments at 11 and Exhibit A.

low channel VHF station costs about $400,000, it costs a UHF station almost three times that figure for a UHF transmitter.[30/]

The economic studies submitted with the Comments of the National Association of Broadcasters ("NAB") demonstrate that VHF network affiliates on average receive higher ratings and generate much higher revenues than UHF network affiliates.[31/] As set forth in the Everett Study, VHF affiliates in all DMAs averaged a 9.8 prime-time rating while UHF affiliates in the same markets averaged only a 6.4 prime-time rating.[32/] Similar evidence showing the disparity in ratings was presented in ALTV's Comments.[33/]

The disparity in revenues is even greater, far exceeding 50%. For example, from 1993 through 1996, UHF affiliates of ABC, NBC and CBS generated 41.8% to 44.1% of the net revenues, 34.3% to 37.1% of the cash flow, and 19.6% to 24.1% of the pre-tax profits that were generated by VHF affiliates of the same networks.[34/] In 1996 alone, ABC's UHF affiliates generated only 32.4% of the net revenues, 4.5% of the pre-tax profits, and 24.6% of the cash flow that was generated by ABC's VHF affiliates, reflecting a 75% disparity.[35/] If the UHF

30/ *Id.*

31/ *See* Stephen E. Everett, Ph.D., *The "UHF Penalty" Demonstrated* (the "Everett Study"), at 1, submitted as Appendix C to the Comments of the National Association of Broadcasters, MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998 ("NAB Comments"); Mark R. Fratrik, Ph.D., *A Financial Analysis of the UHF Handicap,* submitted as Appendix D to NAB Comments, at 1 (the "Fratrik Study").

32/ Everett Study at 1. *See* Paxson Comments at 9.

33/ *See* ALTV Comments at 21-25.

34/ Fratrik Study at 2, Figure 1.

35/ *Id.* at 5, Figure 3.

handicap no longer exists, how does ABC explain this 75% disparity between its UHF and VHF affiliates' economic performance?

The comments and evidence submitted in this proceeding overwhelmingly support Commission action retaining the UHF discount. It cannot be disputed that UHF stations are handicapped in signal reach and that this handicap results in inferior economic performance. Mandatory cable carriage has helped to strengthen UHF stations, but it by no means has corrected the UHF handicap. And, it is certain that digital television and DBS will only perpetuate, not alleviate the UHF handicap. In short, the continued existence of the UHF handicap warrants retaining the UHF discount.[36/]

E. The UHF Discount Serves to Enhance Diversity and Competition.

There is no factual basis for CME's assertion that the UHF discount stifles competition and diversity because it purportedly "provides an unfair competitive advantage" to UHF owners

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[36/] ABC's suggestion that the Commission alternatively apply the UHF discount on a market-by-market basis is untenable and unsupported by the meager evidence that ABC submits. *See* ABC Comments at 21. The 50% discount is a bright-line rule, easy to apply and accurately reflecting the UHF handicap described above. *Review of the Commission's Regulations Governing Attribution of Broadcast and Cable/MDS Interests; Review of the Commission's Regulations and Policies Affecting Investment in the Broadcast Industry; Reexamination of the Commission's Cross-Interest Policy, Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making*, 11 FCC Rcd 19895, 19901 (1996) ("We seek to apply bright line attribution tests wherever possible"); *Amendment of Parts 20 and 24 of the Commissions Rules, Report and Order.* 11 FCC Rcd 7824, 7881 (1996) (adopting "bright line" twenty percent attribution rule in CMRS ownership context in part to avoid "problems" inherent in "frequent case-by-case determinations of control, which are time-consuming, fact-specific, and subjective"), *modified*, 11 FCC Rcd 8714 (1996), *recons. denied,* 12 FCC Rcd 14031 (1997); *Amendment of Commission's Rules to Establish New Personal Communications Services in the 2 GHz Band, Further Order on Reconsideration*, 9 FCC Rcd 4441, 4441 (1994) (observing that Commission previously had "reaffirmed our bright-line cross-ownership attribution standards" for cellular and broadband PCS because such rules "would result in a faster, less burdensome licensing process;" on further reconsideration, Commission added a multiplier to PCS ownership rules similar to that used in broadcast attribution rules).

over VHF owners.[37] Indeed, CME is wrong for more reasons than can be counted. First, as described above, the economic performance of UHF stations simply does not bear out CME's conclusion. UHF stations that garner only 25% of the revenues earned by their VHF counterparts do not have any advantages, much less a competitive advantage. Second, the historical improvement in UHF service and the growth of new broadcast networks, enabled by the UHF discount, has resulted in *increased* program diversity, offering viewers more choices, and *more effective* competition for the larger and more established television networks. Finally, since the UHF discount was adopted, the video programming industry has exploded -- there are far more alternatives for viewers today than existed in 1985, making it clear that the UHF discount has not had and could not have an adverse impact on competition or diversity.

1. The UHF Discount Has Contributed to the Growth in UHF Television Service.

CME fails to recognize that absent the UHF discount, group owners like Paxson and Fox would have very little incentive to acquire and invest capital in UHF stations. Moreover, with the increased ownership opportunities made available by the UHF discount, group owners are able to realize economies of scale and operational efficiencies that improve UHF station performance, and in turn, service to the public.

UHF stations' limited signal reach and difficulties in securing cable carriage simply make UHF stations less attractive properties than VHF stations. As a result, the economic investment necessary to improve UHF station performance could not be sustained if a group owner could not use the UHF discount to acquire a sufficiently large number of stations.

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[37] CME Comments at 18-19.

Through the UHF discount, Paxson, Fox and other group owners have acquired a significant number of UHF stations, thereby overall increasing UHF station potential and resulting in an overall increase in the number of UHF stations nationwide. Over the past two years alone, Paxson has constructed 17 full power UHF stations, and has substantially rebuilt the technical facilities of approximately 20 more full power UHF stations. In addition, Paxson's "Proposal to the FCC to Increase Broadcast Diversity," if adopted, could result in the licensing of an additional 100 television stations, many of them in the UHF band.[38/] Absent the UHF discount, however, there would be no incentive for Paxson or any other group owner to engage in these efforts to enhance the UHF service.

Moreover, by virtue of the UHF discount, UHF stations under Paxson's ownership are able to take advantage of the efficiencies that naturally arise under group ownership. Through the sharing of programming, administrative and technical support, and marketing and advertising sales services, Paxson's UHF stations operate more efficiently. The cost savings realized from these economies of scale have significant public interest benefits because they enhance each station's ability to provide high-quality programming and public service.[39/] Operating independently of the network or under separate ownership, however, it is unlikely that these stations could achieve the same efficiencies or provide the same level of service.

38/ *See* Paxson Comments at 30 n.62.

39/ *See* NBC Comments at 15-16; ABC Comments at 6-7; Comments of CBS Corporation, MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 11 ("CBS Comments").

2. *The UHF Discount Is Critical to the Development of New Networks.*

The comments in this proceeding amply demonstrate that the UHF discount provides a significant incentive for the development of new broadcast networks.[40/] With the explosive growth in the video programming industry, the broadcast network models established by ABC, CBS and NBC in the 1950s are simply unworkable for a broadcast network emerging in 1998. The majority of the "Big Three" affiliates are separately-owned, operate independently of the network and receive compensation from the network. This model may have worked when only three broadcast networks dominated the video programming market, but it is not feasible for a new network that must compete not only with the "Big Three" networks, but also with Fox, UPN and WB and numerous other media for affiliates, viewers and advertisers. The new economic paradigm based on ownership of, rather than affiliation with, distribution outlets will be the key to any new network's success. Ownership of a sufficient number of distribution outlets, however, can only be achieved through the UHF discount.

In ten days, Paxson will launch its new broadcast television network, PAXTV, that will serve as the new model for broadcast network organization. Paxson currently owns 49 television stations nationwide, and after the completion of pending acquisitions and transactions, will own a total of 69 stations, that will serve as the primary distribution system for PAXTV. It is only through its ownership of these stations that Paxson can ensure that PAXTV will have sufficient distribution at its launch. Absent the UHF discount, of course, Paxson's ownership of this

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[40/] *See* ALTV Comments at 27-29.

number of stations would be prohibited[41] and it is unlikely that Paxson would even be attempting the monumental task of launching a new broadcast network.

With its unique programming and large-scale distribution in top U.S. television markets, PAXTV will provide a much-needed alternative to video programming currently available to U.S. consumers. Unduplicated by other broadcast and cable networks, PAXTV's programming will consist of one-hour drama, situation comedy, talk and information programs and movies, that will be family-oriented, focusing on family values and other issues of broad interest to families. PAXTV programming will be free of the explicit sex, senseless violence and foul language that is found in so many television programs today. At its launch, PAXTV will offer *15* hours of family-oriented original programming each week, including *Little Men, The New Flipper, Neon Rider, It's a Miracle, Great Day, Women's Day* and two hours of children's educational informational programming. The network's leading prime-time programs further exemplify the family focus -- *Touched By An Angel; Promised Land; Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman; Diagnosis Murder; Highway to Heaven;* and *Life Goes On.* In short, as the seventh broadcast network, PAXTV not only will be able to offer viewers more program choices but also will serve as a viable competitor for the other broadcast networks. None of this would be possible, however, if Paxson could not use the UHF discount to ensure an adequate distribution system for its network programming.

Paxson's reliance on UHF stations to build its network distribution system is consistent with the development of other networks. Fox, UPN and WB all have used and continue to use

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[41] The stations' aggregate audience reach exceeds 50% of U.S. television households not taking into account the UHF discount. Applying the UHF discount, Paxson's stations are attributed with only 33.77% of U.S. television households.

UHF stations to "grow" their networks. As outlined in Paxson's Comments, the majority of the newer networks' affiliates are UHF stations. UPN has approximately 27 VHF affiliates, compared to 129 UHF affiliates.[42/] Fox's affiliates consist of 132 UHF affiliates and only 41 VHF affiliates.[43/] It also is undisputed that these new networks have increased competition and diversity in the television industry. As each network has attempted to target various demographic groups, they have provided viable alternatives to "Big Three" network programming. And, they have enhanced the level of competition in the network programming market, as evidenced by Fox's successful bids to air national sports programming. PAXTV will make an equally significant contribution to network competition and program diversity.

3. National and Local Competition for the Delivery of News, Information and Entertainment to American Consumers Has Never Been Greater.

The UHF Discount has not had, nor will it have, any negative effect on program diversity or competition. As Paxson and numerous other commenters observed in their comments, Americans currently are faced with a tremendously broad array of news, information and entertainment vehicles.[44/] NAB pointed out that a double-digit increase in the number of television stations during just the last eleven years has come about during a time when cable systems, offering an ever increasing number of channels, and VCR players have enjoyed amazing increases in their household penetration rates.[45/] The enormous number of video

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[42/] Paxson Comments at 19-20 & n.46.

[43/] *Id.* at 20 & n.47.

[44/] *See, e.g.,* Paxson Comments at 28; ABC Comments at 3; CBS Comments at 3.

[45/] *See* Mark R. Fratrik, Ph.D., *Media Outlets by Market - Update*, submitted as Appendix A to NAB Comments.

programming options presented to the consumer today has created an intensely competitive market for viewers and national and local advertising revenues.[46/] At the same time, competition has reduced the share of such revenues received by a single entity.[47/] In today's multichannel, multioutlet video market, every video program supplier and distributor is constrained by the unforgiving forces of a highly competitive marketplace.

In addition, consumers easily can step outside of the video programming market to obtain timely news, information and entertainment programming. Like television, the number of radio stations has grown dramatically, such that, today, the average DMA has approximately *84* commercial radio stations.[48/] Those markets also boast an average of *18* newspapers reaching over 1,000 readers and *10* news magazines with at least a five percent penetration rate.[49/] Even more significantly, the Internet has experienced explosive growth in the past five years. Chairman Kennard observed just last month that 75 million Americans now use e-mail and that number is expected to almost double in just three years.[50/] And, according to the Newspaper Association of America, more Americans use the Internet than subscribe to daily newspapers.[51/] Americans can select from among an unquantifiable number of web sites both here and abroad

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[46/] *See, e.g.,* NBC Comments at 4.

[47/] *See id.*

[48/] NAB Comments at 5 (citing *Media Outlets by Market - Update).*

[49/] *Id.*

[50/] Chairman William E. Kennard, Remarks before the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (July 27, 1998), at 3.

[51/] Comments of the Newspaper Association of America, MM Docket No. 98-35, filed July 21, 1998, at 36.

for news, information and even real-time video and audio programming. As eloquently noted by NAB, "[c]ompetition for the eyes and ears of the American public has never been greater and the prospects for further competition have never been more promising."[52/]

Today's world of seemingly endless choices for information and entertainment fuels fierce demand for viewers and advertisers among television, cable, DBS, radio, newspapers, magazine and Internet content providers. This competition, in turn, assures the presence of multiple media viewpoints in national and local markets. Indeed, the market has now succeeded in accomplishing the important goal of providing a plurality of viewpoints, a goal which lies at the very center of the Commission's broadcast ownership regulatory scheme. It is simply impossible to believe that in an environment with scores of broadcast stations in each local market, 100-channel cable and DBS systems, and widespread Internet usage, the UHF discount will have an adverse impact on the diversity of viewpoints available to American consumers.[53/]

Finally, the UHF discount need not even be factored into the Commission's analysis of

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[52/] NAB Comments at 4-5.

[53/] Contrary to the suggestion of some commenters, "large broadcast ownership groups" simply cannot "monopolize the available viewpoint outlets," thus causing a reduction in viewpoint diversity. *See* CME Comments at 8. Broadcast owners are subject to a number of significant FCC and antitrust constraints on the numbers and types of "viewpoint outlets" they may own (*e.g.*, broadcast/newspaper cross-interest ban, broadcast/cable cross-interest ban, one-to-a-market rule, local radio ownership rules, etc.). As a result, an attempt to acquire an excessive number of viewpoint outlets in a given market is legally impossible. Given the growth in broadcast stations, cable penetration and other media over the past decade, such a reduction in outlets also is practically and financially impossible. In addition, the sheer number of video program suppliers and distributors competing at the national, regional and local level for every broadcast, cable and DBS viewer ensures that a handful of broadcasters are unable to "control" the public's video programming options. In any event, CME's documentation of a few anecdotal examples of broadcasters' possible attempts to influence the content on one or more owned stations by citation to media outlets in fact demonstrates that such efforts are quickly (and often harshly) publicized by the broadcasters' competitors in the fierce market for viewers and readers.